

HOOSIER HERITAGE--THE MONON



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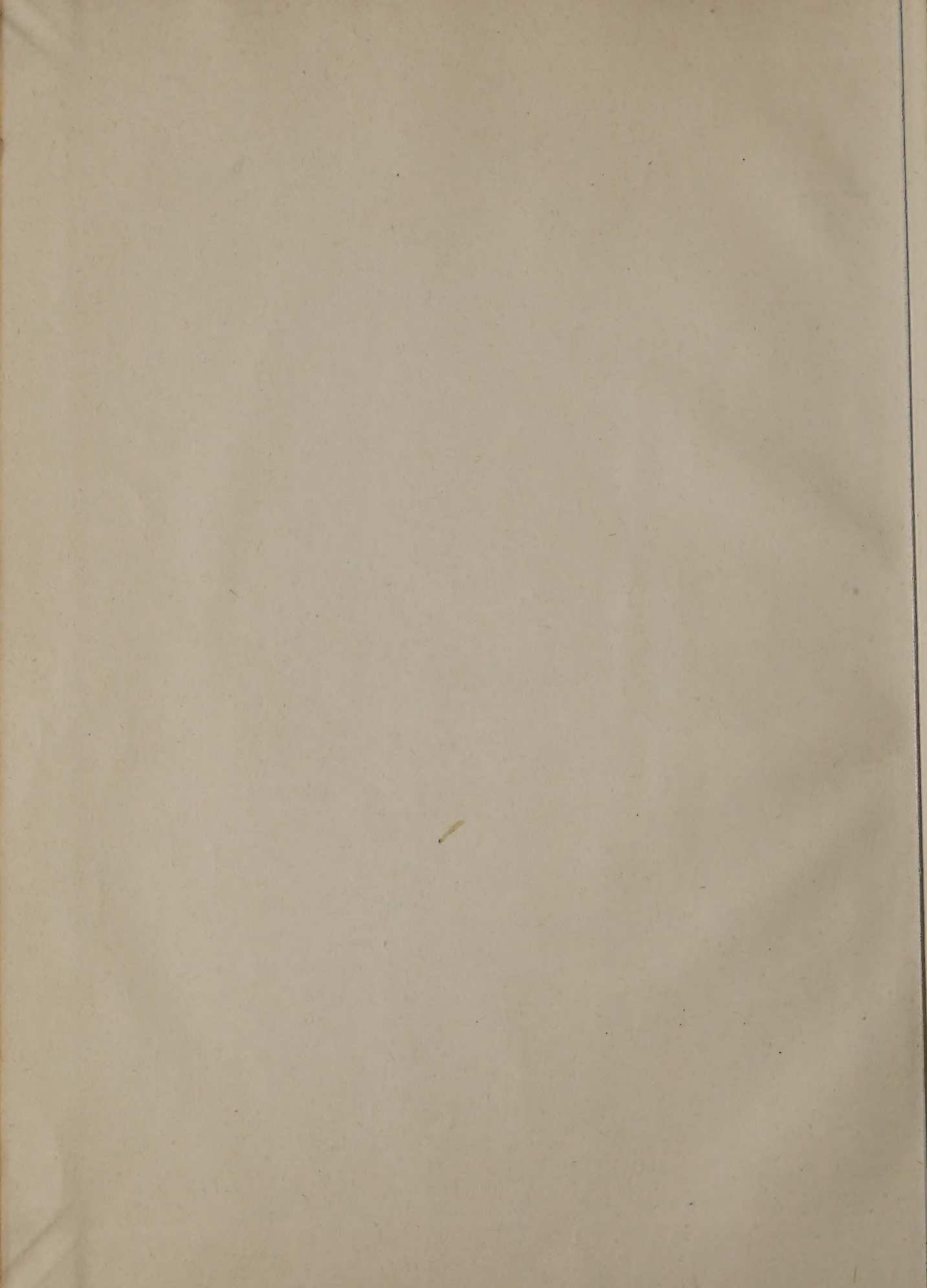














HOOSIER HERITAGE -- THE MONON

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An Address to the  
RAILWAY AND LOCOMOTIVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
CHICAGO CHAPTER

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OCTOBER 11, 1946.

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By

VERNON A. HEWITT

Treasurer and Asst. to President

CHICAGO, INDIANAPOLIS AND LOUISVILLE RAILWAY COMPANY

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It is a tribute to the fascination of the railroad industry that your membership, many of whom are not identified with it by occupation, nevertheless have banded themselves together into the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society for the purpose of seeking and exchanging information on this intriguing subject. It is my happy privilege to have been invited to contribute for your Society a brief chapter to the lore of American Railroads.

The choice of the railroad selected for consideration tonight, the Monon, is most timely, since it comes on the eve of that road's Centennial celebration. Next July it will have been in existence one hundred years. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to tell you something of the story of this railroad, because it is so essentially an Indiana institution, and I am a native Hoosier. Virtually all of my business life has been spent in its service. In certain respects its career and mine have been somewhat parallel. It has gone through good times and bad, as I have done. On various occasions it has been in financial difficulties, as I have been. Just now we both have a few dollars in the bank, and with true Hoosier optimism, we are looking forward to better times ahead.

The corporate name of the road was originally (in 1847) the New Albany & Salem Railroad Company. Later it was changed to Louisville, New Albany and Chicago, and still later to the present name, Chicago, Indianapolis and Louisville Railway Company. Unlike some railroads, it actually reaches the towns and cities included in its name. Most commonly it is known by the shorter and more convenient term "The Monon". Much diligent search has been made to learn exactly the source and meaning of the word "Monon". The research has been interesting, but not exactly conclusive. A number of years ago a student at the University of Chicago wrote to former President Kurrie inquiring about it. He







said that in his study of the Greek language he had discovered the word "Monon", and its meaning in Greek was "the only" or "the only one". No evidence has been adduced to prove that the name was applied to the railroad because of those implications. Mr. Kurrie replied to the inquiring student that, while he was unable to verify the young man's theory, there could be no possible objection to having the Monon regarded in the light of the Greek significance of the word, "the only one". Recently a friend wrote to Mr. J. W. Barriger, now President of the Monon, stating that certain information had come to his knowledge concerning the origin of the word. I quote a portion of his letter to Mr. Barriger:

"The village of Monon (Indiana) was incorporated in 1879, under the name which in 1848 was given to a post office. The early post office and township were named for Big and Little Monon Creeks.

"Monon is a Potawatomi word equivalent to Tote or Carry. The spelling of the creek name was originally Monong. Big Monon Creek was called Metamonong, Meta meaning Big.

"Whether Potawatomi or not, there is activity in a word which, translated into our expansive language means 'to carry', especially when it is applied to transportation."

Professor Frank F. Hargrave, of Purdue University, lends support to this theory in a footnote found in his estimable history of the Monon, reading as follows:

"The meaning of the word Monon is somewhat doubtful. It has been declared by some to be a Potawatami Indian name meaning 'to carry'. There is also a tradition that the term means 'swiftly moving.'"

Probably the theory best known among Hoosiers as to the origin of the name is found in a paragraph written by the late George Ade, famous Indiana humorist. His brief essay on the Monon has been reproduced in the road's dining car menu folders for many years. Its lyric quality justifies its quotation in full, as follows:

"The traveler who wishes to see Indiana must go riding on the Monon. It was the first Iron Trail to be pushed from one end of the state to the other. That is why so many worth-while things may be seen from the car window.





"The Monon pathway is by open prairies and deep woodland, across the Kankakee and Tippecanoe and Wabash, up to the gates of important cities, and through the quiet shades of college towns. It links the Ohio with the Grand Calumet and lays a friendly hand on factories, fields and quarries through an important chain of counties.

"The name 'Monon' is Indian. It means 'swift-running'. The railway began to make history some ninety years ago. My first dream, as a Hoosier boy, was to ride away on the Monon toward the Heaven-piercing spires of Lafayette or Michigan City. The Monon is 'catty-cornered' to the whole State of Indiana, and all its trains are 'Hoosiers'".

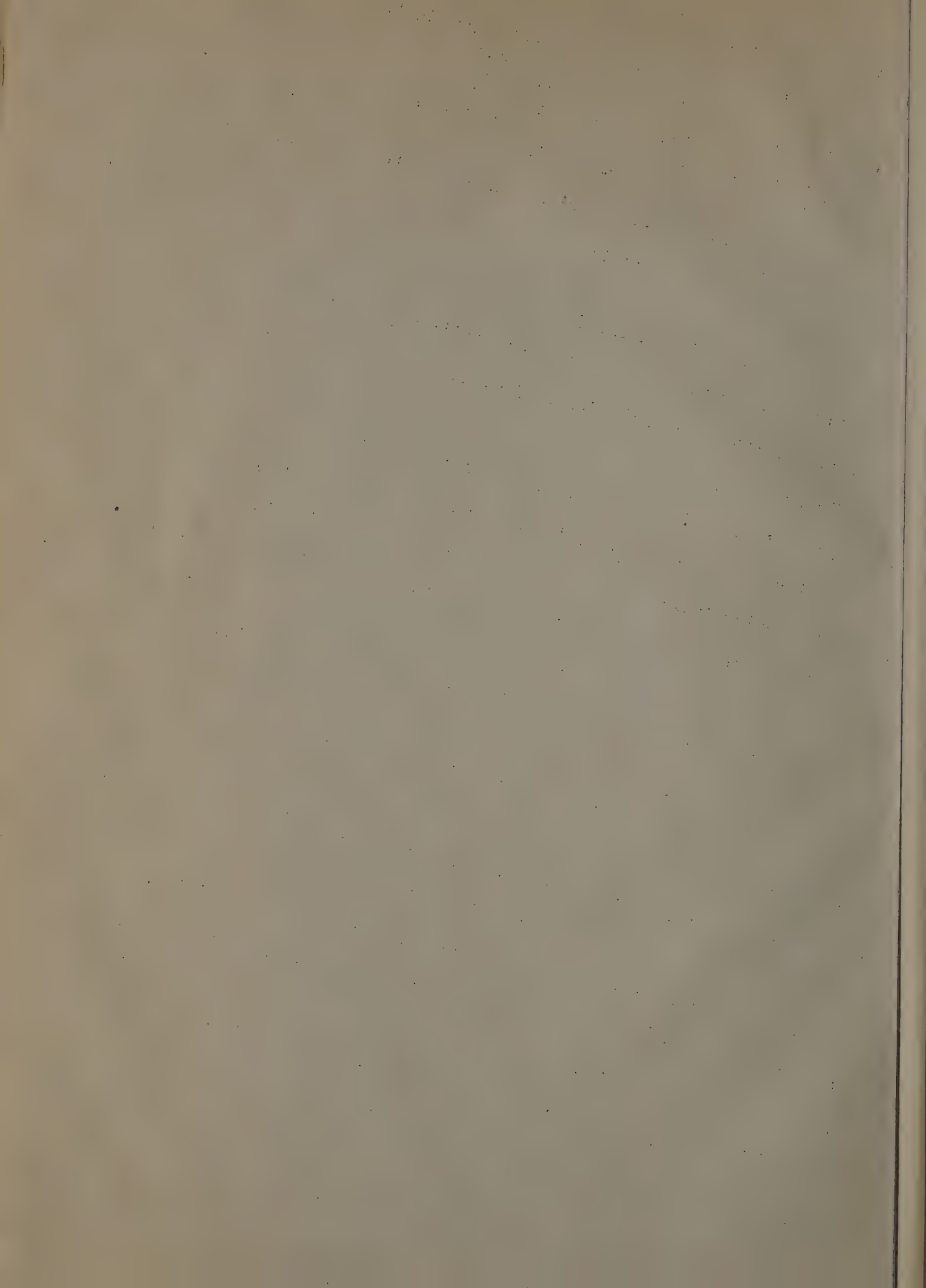
You may take your choice of these theories - or if you have a still different one, we should be glad to know about it.

#### History of the Road

For the origin and development of the Monon Railroad, I have drawn freely from Professor Hargrave's book "A Pioneer Indiana Railroad" (to which I have already briefly referred), not only for convenience, but because it is probably one of the most historically accurate of all the books that have been written on early railroad development. This book was published in 1932, and Professor Hargrave, incidentally, has been asked to revise and bring it down to date and have it reprinted as a feature of the Monon's Centennial Celebration next year. We shall touch only the surface tonight, but for a complete and authentic history of the road, I commend to you Professor Hargrave's painstaking and scholarly work.

During the decade from 1840 to 1850 the time was ripe and the need had been established for the rails to connect the Great Lakes with the Ohio River. Covered wagons, ox carts, prairie schooners and river boats had done their share to populate the country, but the increase in population and the development of industry and agriculture created a demand for improved market facilities. A few years earlier the State of Indiana had embarked on a rather elaborate plan for internal improvements, a phase of which was the construction of an extensive system of macadamized roads, railroads and canals. The State's ambitions ex-





ceeded its abilities. The plan broke down, leaving the State greatly in debt. Not being able to complete the project itself, the State parcelled out to private corporations, to the extent that it could, the right to pursue individual phases of its development plan. One such phase, the one with which we shall concern ourselves now, related to the building of a macadam road between New Albany and Crawfordsville. The State had already begun this project, and some grading and other work had been done before the enterprise was abandoned, and offered to private interests. Citizens of New Albany and Salem, Indiana, desiring improved market facilities between the two towns, organized the New Albany and Salem Railroad Company in 1847, sold stock to finance the venture, and on July 8, 1847, designated the road's corporate name, and elected a Board of Directors. On the same date James Brooks was elected the first President. Mr. Brooks was born in the State of Maine, of English ancestry, and came to the middle west with his parents at the age of 4. Much enacting, repealing, and more enacting of laws by the Indiana General Assembly appear to have been required before all of the legal formalities were adjusted to the new enterprise. Moreover, since the people most interested in the project were not wealthy, subscriptions of stock had to be secured from a great many people of moderate means. Only a part payment was required to be made for the stock at the time of subscription, the remainder to be paid later, and this led to ill feeling between the officials of the road and the stockholders, when the payments were not readily forthcoming. Probably that was not greatly different from the way in which similar transactions result today. Municipalities along the route also subscribed for stock. The estimate made by the President, of the cost of building and equipping the line as far north as Salem (35 miles) was \$235,000 for the road complete, ready for the cars, laid with a flat bar 7/8 by 2½ inches, together with buildings, water stations, and so forth. Locomotives, cars, etc., required for the first year's business were estimated to cost \$65,000, making the total cost \$300,000.





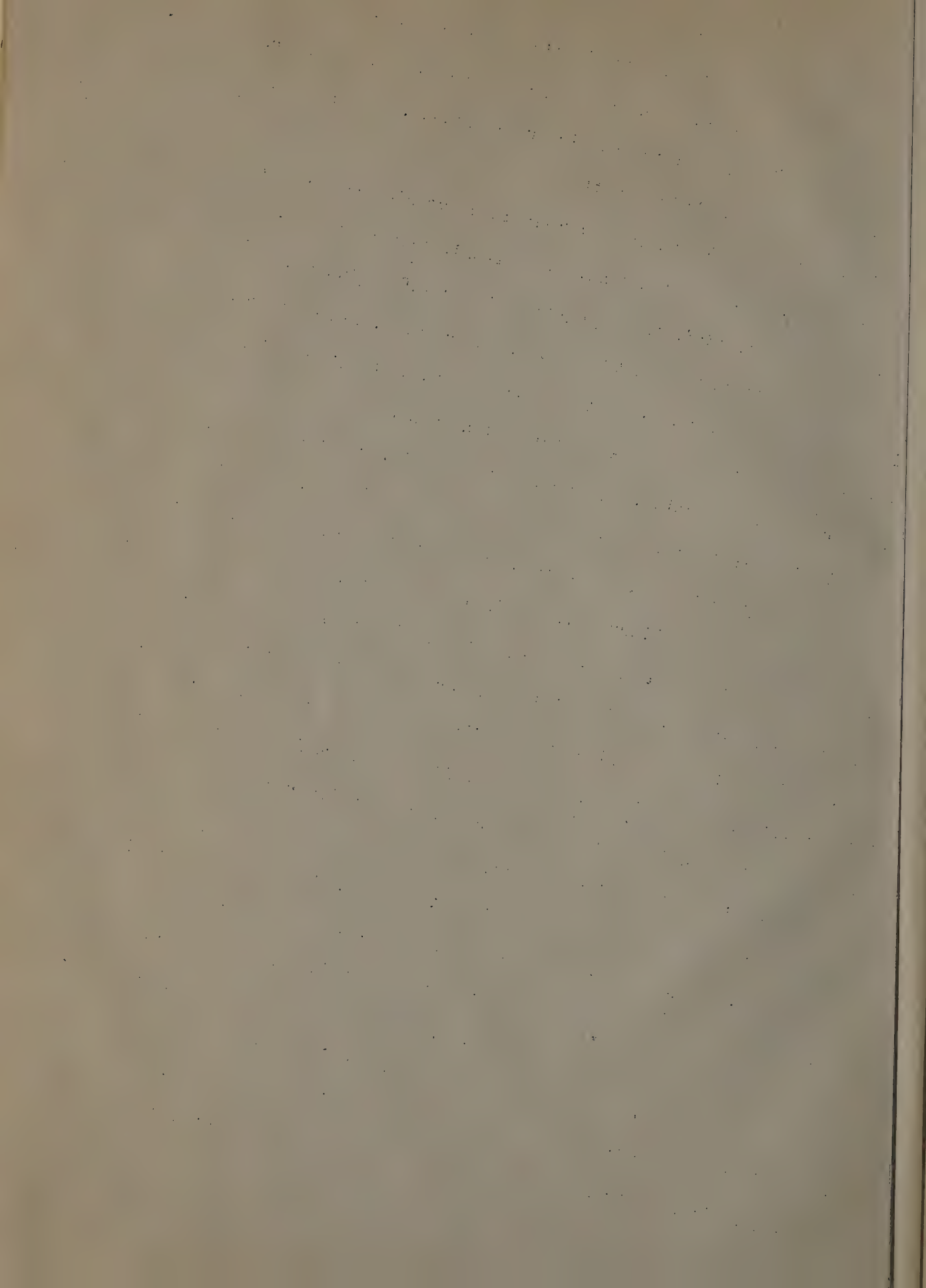


The towns of Salem and New Albany originally subscribed for stock in the new company, and as plans were developed to push the line further northward, the people of the towns affected came into the picture - Orleans, Bedford, Bloomington and others, as far north as Crawfordsville.

Comparatively little information is available concerning the actual construction of the first segment of the line. The organization of the road having been completed in July, 1848, the employment of a chief engineer was authorized in August, at a salary of \$1,500 a year. A Mr. L. B. Wilson served in that capacity for several years. A tentative survey was made by the close of the year, and corp of engineers was employed to find a permanent location and prepare the work for contracting. A contract for initial construction was signed March 28, 1848. First ground was broken on May 3, 1848, beginning at New Albany and proceeding northward. Details of construction are lacking. Certain it is that there was no machinery such as is in use today. Grading was done by hand. Cuts and fills were made by men with wheelbarrows and shovels. Portions of Southern Indiana are quite hilly, and Professor Hargrave records something of the difficulties experienced in building through the line of hills known as "The Knobs", some 22 miles north of New Albany. Here it was necessary to make a cut 34 feet deep, 22 feet of which was through solid rock. This is still one of the road's most vexatious grades.

There were also many curves, the result of efforts to avoid the hills and ease the grades. Many of these curves still exist, and the story goes that trainmen, while flagging from the pilot of an engine, habitually leaned far to the outside when going around a curve, in order to obtain maximum vision around the curve ahead, and to this day you can tell a Southern Division brakeman whenever you see him because he always leans to one side while walking. By July 4, 1849, some three miles of track had been laid northward from New Albany, and on



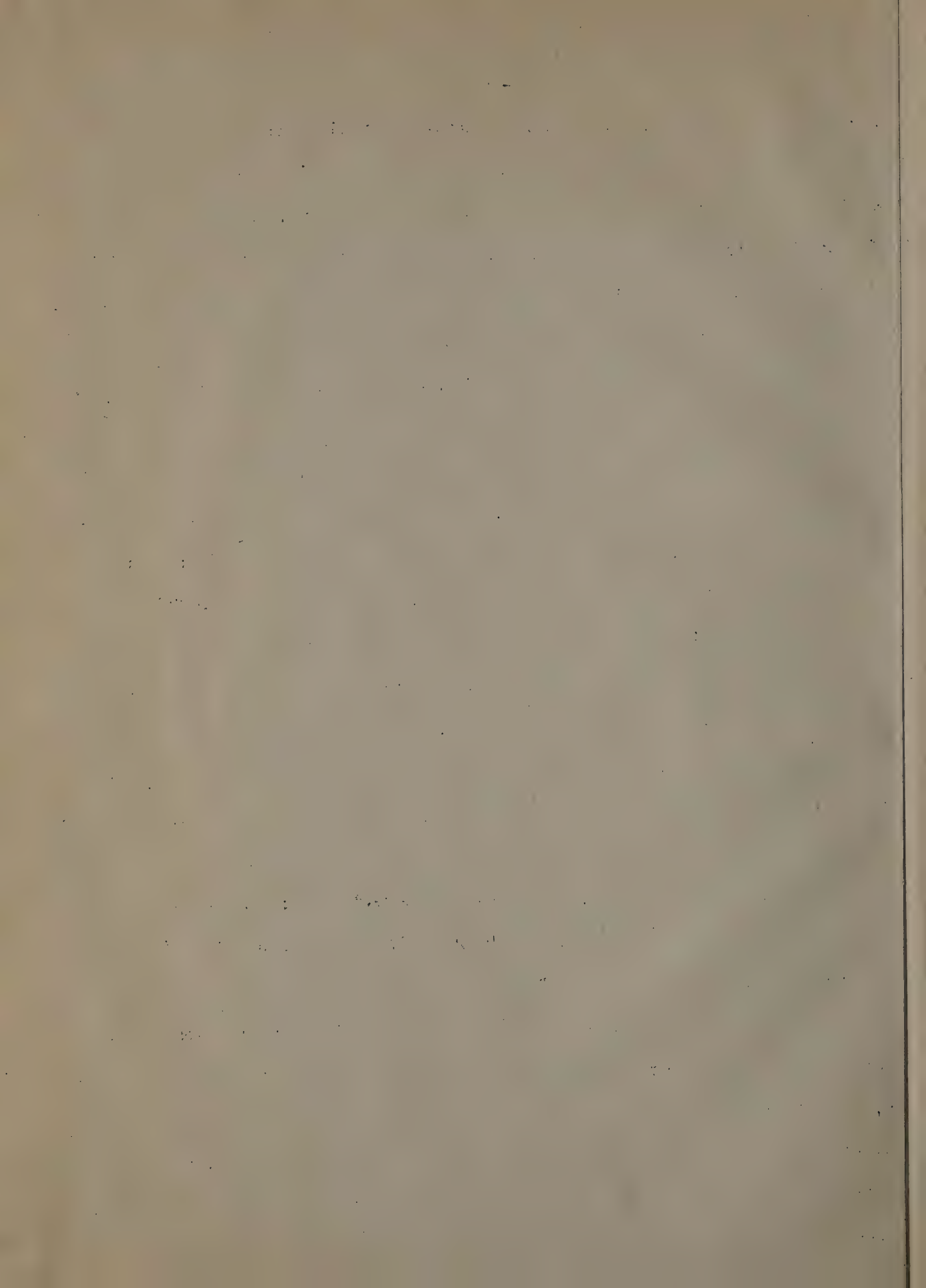


that date an excursion train was run, apparently the first train operation on the road. A newspaper item of June 6, 1850, mentions an excursion over ten miles of road. By July 4, 1850, twenty-two miles had been completed, and trains were run in either direction every three hours throughout the day to carry passengers to and from a grand barbecue which was held where the tracks ended on the North. On January 14, 1851, the road had been completed the entire distance of 35 miles to Salem, thus fulfilling the original intention of connecting Salem with the Ohio River.

In a sense, therefore, the town of Salem may be regarded as having at one time, for a brief period, been the northern terminus of the road, and so, to have a place in history. The story is told that on a certain occasion when a freight train was going down the hill approaching Salem, the fireman felt that the engineer was running a little too fast. Thinking to caution him, he leaned across the cab, pointed forward and shouted: "Salem down there." There was no response from the engineer, other than to pull the throttle open just a little wider, increasing the speed slightly. After a few seconds the fireman became slightly alarmed and again shouted: "Salem down there." Again the only response from the other side of the cab was a slightly increased pressure on the throttle. A third time the fireman shouted: "Salem down there." Apparently a little bit nettled, the engineer shouted back: "What the hell do you think I'm doing? I'm sailin' 'em as fast as they'll roll."

It is of interest to note that in this primitive construction no ballasting was used, and a frame work of wood was required before rails could be put in place. Ties were laid on the grade four feet apart. Notches were cut in the ends of the ties, and wooden stringers were laid on the ties, at right angles to them. The rails, which were simply flat iron bars, weighing about 22 pounds per yard, were then laid on the stringers and fastened down with spikes driven through the



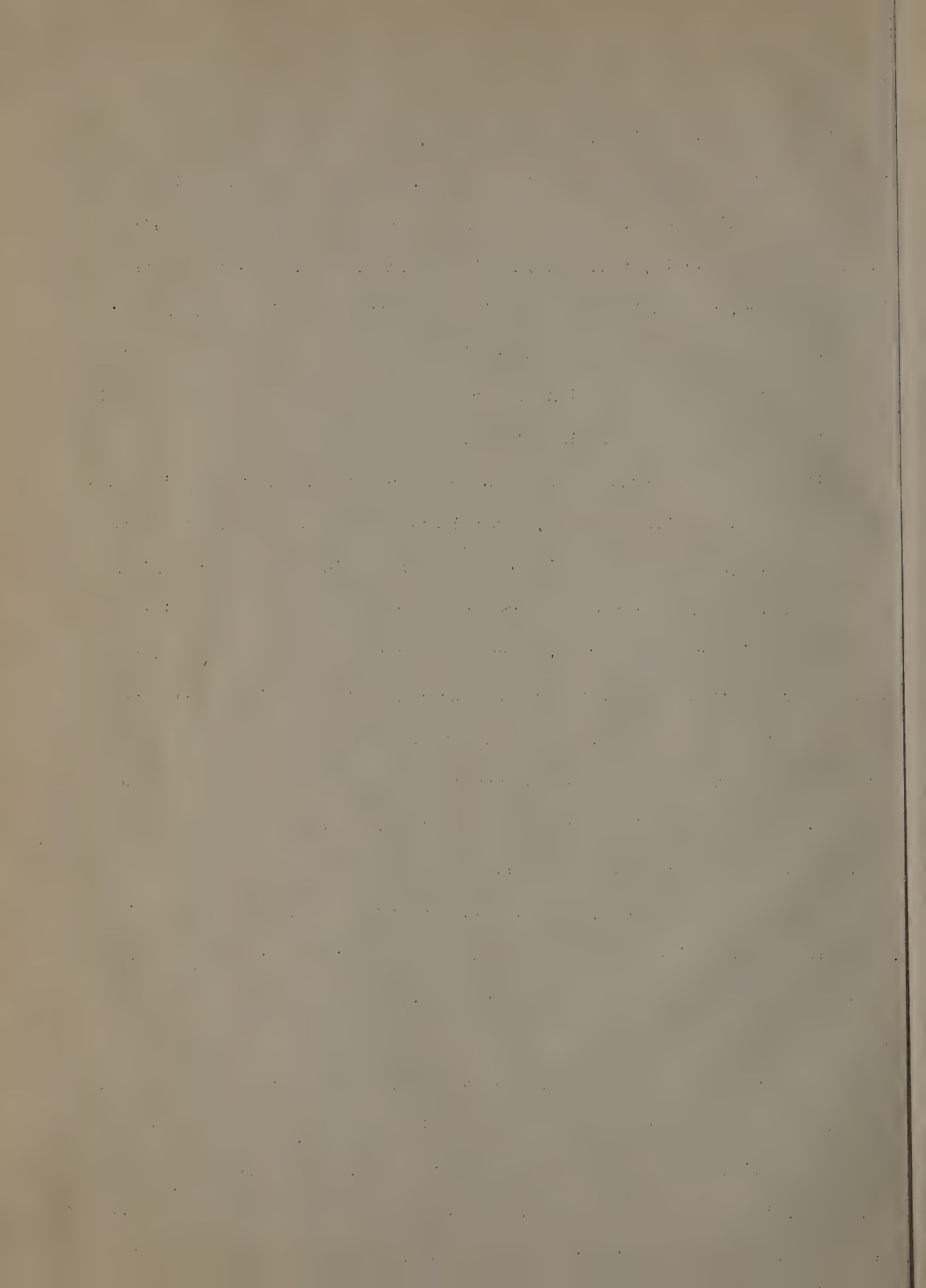


center of the rail about 18 inches apart. This flat rail, however, appears to have been of short life, since by about 1856 the 45 miles originally laid with it had been relaid with T-rail, and subsequent new construction was all with T-rail. All of this T-rail, too, was imported, part of it from Liverpool and some from Cardiff, Wales; and it is an interesting commentary that it was transported almost entirely by water to the place where it was to be used, the water lines thus contributing to the construction of a competing form of transportation which was to greatly overshadow them in importance.

Although the construction between New Albany and Salem was an independent project, yet during its progress, determination was made to push the road further northward. An amendment of its charter was obtained, which was unique in that it permitted the extension of the road anywhere in the State that might be chosen. That was important later on. More stock subscriptions were obtained, and during 1849 contracts were let for construction of 30 additional miles northward from Salem and to a point within 4 miles of Bedford. The portion of the road from Salem to Orleans was completed and the first train run over it on January 1, 1852. This was 57 miles from the Ohio River. Bedford was reached on April 18, 1853, a total distance of 71 miles. North of that point work had been proceeding under other contracts, and Bloomington was reached in the fall of 1853, the first train being operated to that point on October 11th. By January, 113 miles of road from New Albany to Gosport had been completed and were in operation.

To follow the development of the Monon chronologically, it is necessary, for the moment, to skip over a section some 57 miles in length from Gosport northward to Crawfordsville. We shall return to that section of the line later, but the next track, in order of time of construction, was to begin at Crawfordsville and extend 27 miles northward to Lafayette. The same marketing problems which





motivated the people of Salem in starting the New Albany & Salem Railroad confronted the people of Crawfordsville and provided the initial impetus for the construction of the Crawfordsville and Wabash Railroad. A group of Crawfordsville and Montgomery County citizens sought and obtained a charter in 1844, but nothing came of it. Another was obtained two years later, in 1846. As in the case of the New Albany & Salem, money was raised through the sale of stock. The principal objective of the proposed new railroad was to provide a means of transportation from Crawfordsville to connect with an established waterway, the natural choice of which was the Wabash and Erie canal. Under the charter the road could be constructed to join the canal at either Lafayette or Covington. Lafayette was chosen as the point of connection; hence it was decided to build the road between Crawfordsville and Lafayette. For convenience, construction began at Lafayette and proceeded southward, since the rail had to be imported and, after crossing the Atlantic, was sent by boat from New York City up the Hudson River to Albany, thence through the Erie Canal to Buffalo, then to Toledo, and finally by the Wabash and Erie Canal to Lafayette. Surveys appear to have been made in 1847, contracts for grading were let in 1849, and grading had been completed by November, 1850. The placing of the superstructure then followed, and the first rail was laid in June, 1851. The rail had all been laid by June 1, 1852. Considerable rivalry existed between the citizens of Lafayette and Crawfordsville, and since Crawfordsville people were in control of the project, they exasperated the Lafayette people considerably by building the depot at the north end of the line a mile south of Lafayette, away from the business district, and connection was made there with the canal and the Wabash River. Business men of Lafayette countered by building a plank road from Lafayette almost to Crawfordsville, which was a considerable improvement over the mud roads and was designed to attract the trade of the farmers. Eventually in 1852 the New Albany & Salem acquired control of the Crawfordsville and Wabash

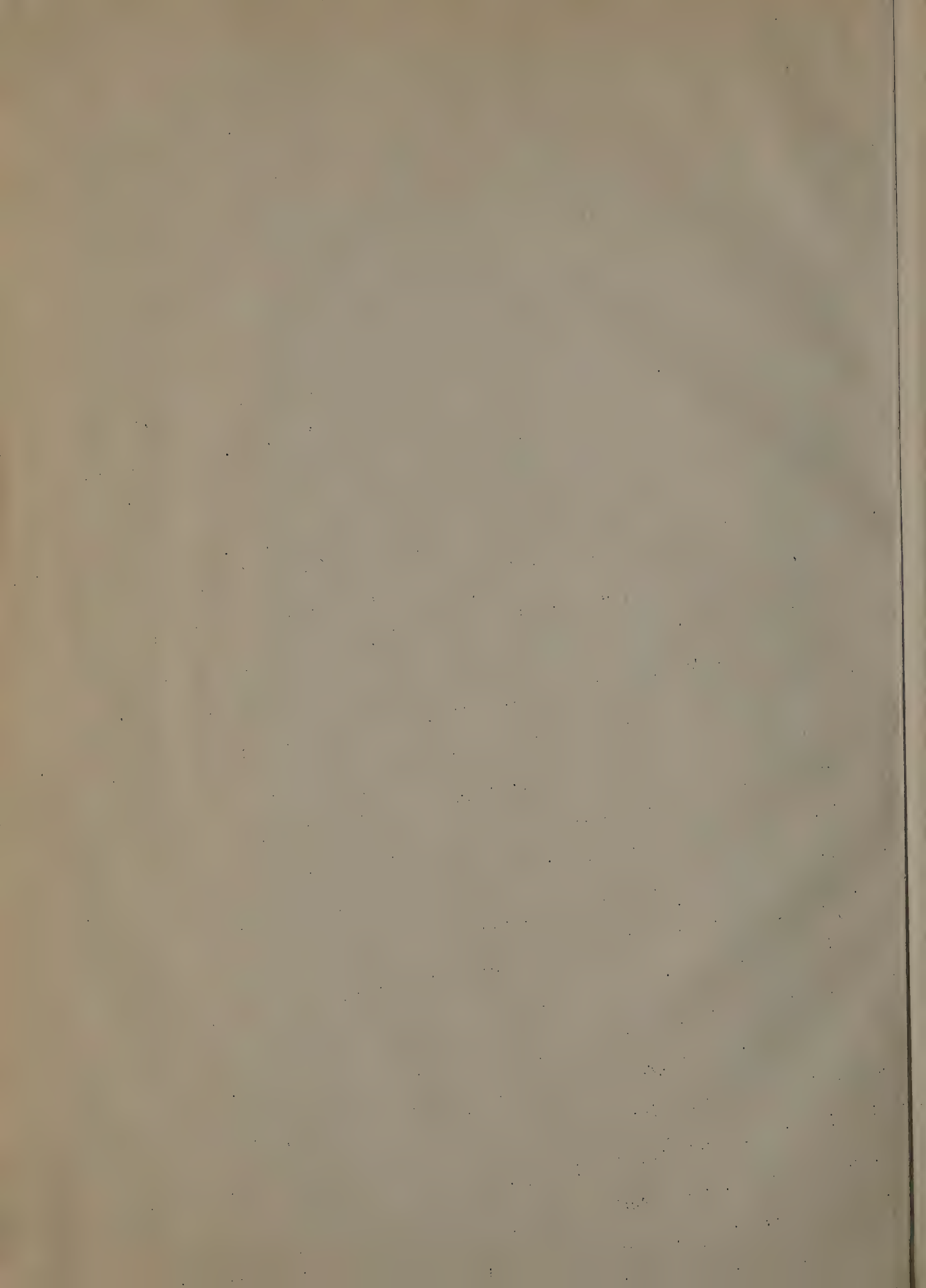




Company, extended the road into the town of Lafayette and built a new depot, which was reached by the first train on March 11, 1853. Even before completion of the road, negotiations were under way to make it a part of the New Albany & Salem, and this was consummated on June 17, 1852, only 17 days after the road was completed, and the Crawfordsville and Wabash Company passed out of existence.

The next segment of line to be constructed was that between Lafayette and Michigan City, a distance of 91 miles. This, too, was undertaken by the New Albany & Salem Company. Raising money for this project presented different problems than theretofore encountered. Practically no towns of any size existed along the proposed route, and the territory was so thinly populated that financing through the sale of stock was impracticable. Peculiarly and providentially, the problems of another railroad company provided a solution to the financing of the line between Lafayette and Michigan City. The Michigan Central Railroad had an ambition to build across northern Indiana into Chicago, but they were refused a charter by the State of Indiana. Eventually an arrangement was made whereby the Michigan Central accomplished its purpose by using the charter of the New Albany & Salem, which, it will be remembered, was a "roving" charter, enabling the New Albany & Salem Company to build anywhere in the State. The details of this transaction with the Michigan Central, and of that company's bitter controversy with its competitor, the Michigan Southern, are items of history upon which time does not afford us opportunity to dwell now, but Professor Hargrave relates the story in interesting and fascinating detail. In return for the right to build under the charter of the New Albany & Salem, the Michigan Central agreed to purchase stock in the N.A.&S. Company to the extent of \$500,000, of which \$400,000 was used on the line north of Lafayette, with \$100,000 left over to be used on the line south of Crawfordsville. First surveys were begun in April, 1851. The route was remarkably straight, the President reporting that the whole distance of 91 miles was less than a half-mile longer than an air line. We under-





stand that in this territory today there is the fourth longest stretch of tangent track to be found in the United States. The first contract was let in August, 1851. After the grading had been done, the work of laying rail southward from Michigan City was begun in July, 1852. By December, 30 miles had been completed. Winter weather caused some slowing down, but by April, 1853, 53 miles had been laid. Some construction had meanwhile been done northward, from Lafayette, and the gap was closed about October 3, 1853, making a continuous line from Michigan City to Crawfordsville.

We have now dealt with the entire line from New Albany to Michigan City, except a gap of some 57 miles from Gosport northward to Crawfordsville. Contracts for this work were let in 1852, and work proceeded simultaneously northward from Gosport and southward from Crawfordsville. We need not dwell on details of this project, since they seem to have followed in general the pattern of the earlier construction. The important thing is that the gap was closed and the last spike driven at 4:00 PM, on June 24, 1854. The first train to operate the entire distance from Michigan City to New Albany was run on July 3, 1854, making the trip in slightly over 16 hours.

Many interesting stories have been told about this trip, and others of that early period. One of them related to an engineer who had a very heavy beard. While somewhere in the vicinity of Crawfordsville, a gust of wind came into the cab and blew the engineer's whiskers up over his face. He applied the brakes with such alacrity that a considerable jolt resulted. Presently he released them, and the train began to pick up speed again. The fireman called over to the engineer: "Uncle John, why did you set the brakes back there?" The engineer called back: "Didn't you see that hay stack we ran into?"

The completion of the line from Michigan City to New Albany was an historic event, since the Ohio River and Lake Michigan were at last united by an important artery of commerce. The task had been completed in about 7 years.





Although many great events have occurred in the State, probably this achievement may be regarded as the greatest engineering accomplishment of the people of Indiana, in view of the difficult conditions existing at that time.

For the first two or three years after beginning operation the road made a small profit. Drought conditions, the panic of 1857, and other difficulties resulted in default in payment of bond interest, and a trustee was appointed on October 1, 1858. Since the length of the road had surpassed the original intent of building it between New Albany and Salem, it was considered that the original name was no longer appropriate, and by a special act of the legislature passed October 24, 1859, the name was changed to Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railroad Company.

The road managed to continue operations, under difficult financial conditions. The Civil War came along, and greatly increased earnings from the transportation of troops and war materials produced a period of relative prosperity, though equipment was pitifully inadequate to take care of all requirements. The road appears to have played its full part, and an important one, in the conduct of the war. One notable event was the movement of a special funeral train, bearing the body of the martyred President, Abraham Lincoln, over the line from Lafayette to Michigan City on May 1, 1865, whence it was handled by the Michigan Central to Chicago.

Renewed financial difficulties followed the close of the war. On April 8, 1869, the road was sold to Trustees representing the claims of the first mortgage holders. The sale was set aside on legal technicalities the following year, but subsequently the mortgages were foreclosed and the road was again sold on December 27, 1872. The Trustees organized a new company known as the Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railway Company, which was chartered on January 7, 1873.

For the next few years the road apparently was able to operate on a

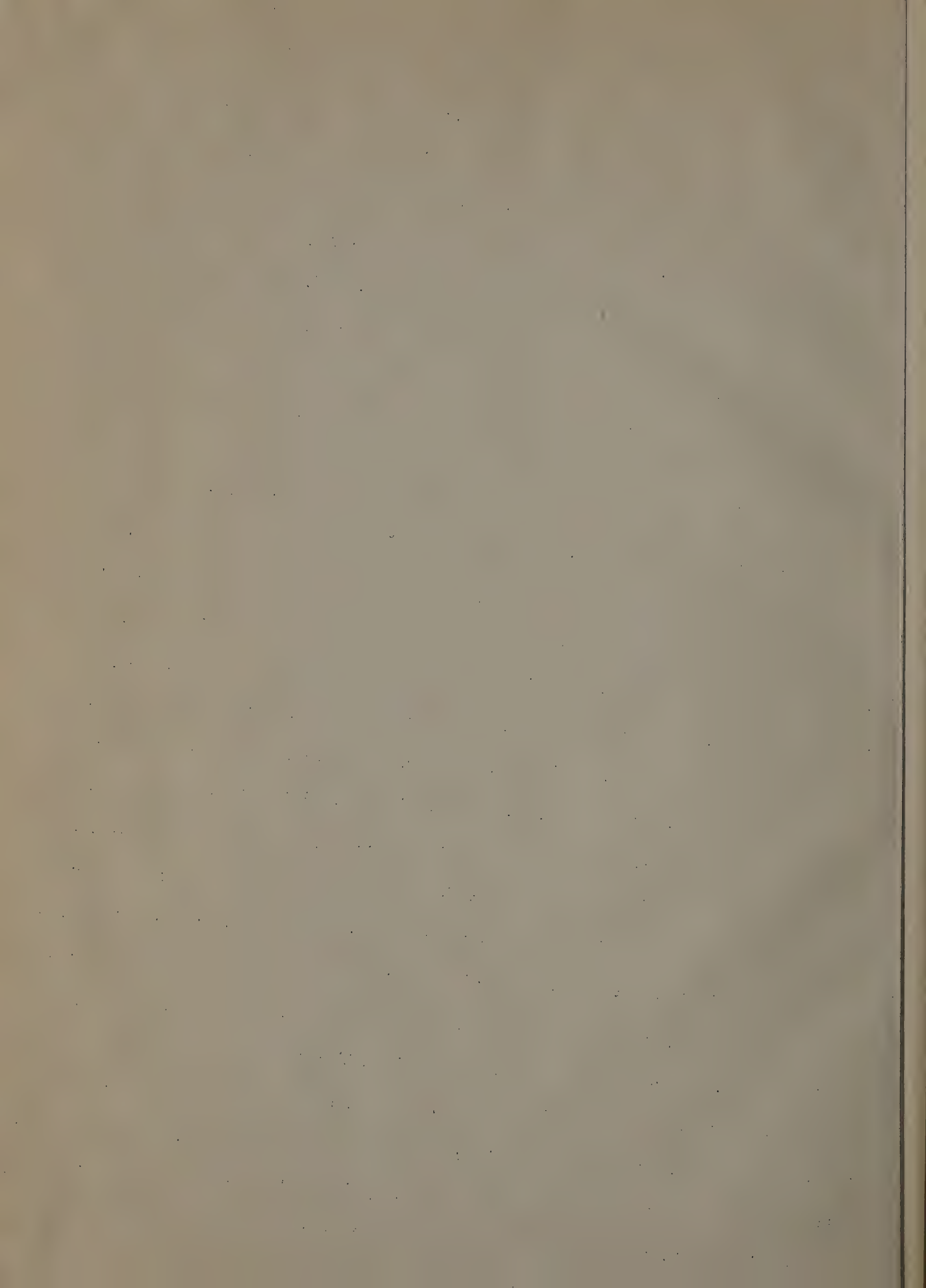




solvent basis. In 1881 it effected a consolidation with the Chicago and Indianapolis Air Line, which is that portion of the present system extending from Hammond to Indianapolis. That line had been in process of construction since 1872, part of it narrow gauge, and it was not completed until 1884, when a connection was built with the Western Indiana Railroad near Hammond. That connection completed the job of uniting Chicago with Indianapolis and Louisville, and finished the construction of the line as it now exists.

But the new system was not born without travail. The purchase of the line between Hammond and Indianapolis, together with another period of unfavorable economic conditions, brought a renewal of financial troubles, the road defaulted in its obligations, and a receiver was appointed on August 24, 1896. Foreclosure proceedings again resulted, and again the road was sold, on March 10, 1897. Reorganization ensued, and the road was incorporated on March 31, 1897, under the present name, Chicago, Indianapolis and Louisville Railway Company. Within a few years thereafter, control by stock ownership was acquired by Southern Railway and Louisville & Nashville, whose financial interest in the company was, by mutual agreement, exactly equal. At no time did either line acquire more or less of the stock of the Monon than did the other. Aided by the traffic support of these two strong lines, the Monon enjoyed a relatively long period of prosperity. For upwards of 40 years it proudly carried on its functions of serving its Hoosier patrons. During that period many things worth while could be related, but time does not permit us to dwell upon them tonight. One of the most noteworthy events, and one which demonstrates the affectionate and jealous attitude of the Hoosier family for their railroad was their spontaneous and virile uprising against the proposal that the road be absorbed by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in the 20's. The people of Indiana joined other interests in vigorously opposing the plan, and, as you know, it was not carried out.

A brief message appears near the end of Professor Hargrave's book which,





in the light of subsequent developments, appears now to hold a tinge of irony and even tragedy. I should like to read it to you, and ask you to bear in mind that it was written in 1932, when the great depression was upon us but obviously before its full impact had been realized. Here it is:

"In respect to the prosperity of the road in recent years, it can be said that it has systematically paid dividends on all outstanding stock, both preferred and common, and under its present prosperity bids fair to continue to do so."

There came the crash of 1929. Traffic dropped sharply, and the road failed to pay dividends. Then it failed even to pay interest on its outstanding bonds. The inevitable happened. The road became so ill financially that it was necessary to hurry it into the bankruptcy hospital and surround it with a legal oxygen tent. Doctors called Trustees were placed in charge of the patient. Their most potent tool was the expense-cutting knife. The operation was successful, but the patient darn near died. The illness lasted for twelve and one-half years. At 12:01 A.M. on May 1st of this year the road emerged from bankruptcy, with a new lease on life. Under the able leadership of its new President, Mr. Barriger, administering policies formulated by a distinguished roster of Directors all of us who have the good fortune to be associated with the road confidently look forward to the complete fulfillment of the aims and ambitions which Mr. Barriger has created for it. A new vigor and enthusiasm and a sense of "going somewhere" have been breathed into the consciousness of every officer and employee and to the last man there is a fixed determination to build on the ruins of the past a bright and glorious future.

Many things remain to be said which cannot be said here tonight, for lack of time. Mention should be made of the construction in the late 80's of the Orelans, Paoli and Jasper Railway, later the Orleans, West Baden and French Lick Springs Railway, the 18-miles of branch line over which you may now ride to drink Pluto water or play golf at French Lick, or marvel at the beauty of the

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logwood in the spring and the riot of color in the fall. For sheer grandeur, Southern Indiana ranks with the finest of Nature's beauty spots. Mention should also be made of the Indianapolis and Louisville Railroad, a branch line constructed in the early part of the present century, extending from the main line at a point a few miles south of Greencastle, a distance of some 47 miles into the prolific coal fields of southwestern Indiana.

Among the illustrious names associated with the road's history, there should be mentioned the fact that James Roosevelt, father of the late President of the United States, was President of the Monon for a little more than a year in 1884-1885. Likewise, an uncle of the President, Frederic A. Delano, was President of the Monon from December, 1913, to August, 1914, immediately preceding H. R. Kurrie, who retained the office for 24 years and 4 months until his death on Christmas Day of 1938, to establish a record for the longest service of all the road's chief executives, of whom there have been about twenty.

The universal use of the automobile over splendid highways are marks of inevitable human progress, and that has undeniably taken away permanently much passenger traffic from the rails. We may never again see the time when several 15-car sections of passenger trains will be standing in the Dearborn Station waiting to depart for the Kentucky Derby or French Lick Springs, with their one-time colorful array of famous people - movie folk, statesmen, politicians and plain good-time Charlies. We may never again see similar sections of trains ready to depart for the Speedway Races at Indianapolis. Many other of the former associations of the road have gone the way of the strap rail and the link and pin. But in their places will come, and to some extent there has already come, other evidences of progress - overnight freight service between any two points on the system, faster schedules to compete with the nation's best, heavier rail, easier curves and grades - and, as soon as they can be obtained, fast, comfortable and attractive streamlined trains speeding through the Hoosier countryside.



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There is so much more that might be said, but so little time to say it, and there must be a stopping point - perhaps a rather abrupt one. Though the story is not complete, I hope I have told you a few things of interest about the Monon. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to do so, and I hope that those things will stimulate your interest and curiosity to know more about it. In that event, let me assure you that the door is open and the latch-string is out to any of you who may pay us the compliment of a visit.

And now for our commercial: We should enjoy the privilege of having any of you as guests whenever you have occasion to go riding to Indianapolis, Louisville, or intermediate points; and that car of freight which you may entrust to our care will be treated as a member of the family. In any other manner that may present itself, it will be a pleasure to serve you, and thus carry on the best traditions of the Monon Railroad - the heritage of hardy pioneers to the people of Indiana and of the nation.

**614959**

